

6.0 COORDINATION AND REVIEW

Public Participation

Throughout the 2015 Minnesota State Rail Plan development process, various strategies were used to engage the public, stakeholders and other agencies. These strategies were outlined at the beginning of the project in a Public Involvement Plan. The PIP developed an involvement strategy, including roles and responsibilities, goals and objectives, activities, and outcomes. It is included as [Appendix D](#). The goals and objectives of the engagement process were to:

- Create opportunities for involvement
- Provide opportunities for education and information about the state's rail system
- Use the input to identify opportunities to guide MnDOT's vision for rail
- Integrate and coordinate stakeholder and public involvement with technical tasks

The intended outcome was for stakeholders to actively participate in the project process and assist MnDOT in creating an overall plan that is implementable. To achieve this outcome, the following strategies were implemented:

- Public open house meetings – statewide
- Passenger Rail Forum meetings
- Minnesota Statewide Freight Summit
- Targeted meetings
- MetroQuest online survey
- Website and online engagement

PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE MEETINGS – STATEWIDE

Two rounds of open houses were held to engage the public. The first round occurred October through December 2014, and the second round was in January and February 2015. The purpose of the first round was to introduce and educate attendees on the State Rail Plan and provide opportunities to influence plan development. Throughout the second round, a draft of the State Rail Plan was shared with attendees and there were limited opportunities to influence the final State Rail Plan. A summary of open house dates and locations is shown in [Table 6.1](#), along with the number of attendees and comments received at each open house.

Table 6.1: Open House Locations and Participation

DATE	LOCATION	ATTENDEES	COMMENTS
ROUND 1			
Oct. 16, 2014	Northfield, Minn.	19	10
Nov. 5, 2014	Saint Cloud, Minn.	19	2
Nov. 6, 2014	Eau Claire, Wisc.	98	10
Nov. 10, 2014	Saint Paul, Minn.	13	1
Nov. 12, 2014	Red Wing, Minn.	26	5
Nov. 13, 2014	Mankato, Minn.	17	7
Nov. 17, 2014	Duluth, Minn.	29	10
Nov. 24, 2014	Moorhead, Minn.	14	3
Nov. 25, 2014	Winona, Minn.	12	0
Dec. 8, 2014	Willmar, Minn.	15	4
ROUND 2			
Jan. 21, 2015	Red Wing, Minn.	7	0
Jan. 22, 2015	Mankato, Minn.	16	3
Jan. 26, 2015	Winona, Minn.	35	4
Jan. 29, 2015	Saint Cloud, Minn.	19	4
Feb. 2, 2015	Saint Paul, Minn.	8	0
Feb. 2, 2015	Northfield, Minn.	27	9
Feb. 3, 2015	Duluth, Minn.	6	0
Feb. 5, 2015	Eau Claire, Wisc.	55	9
Feb. 9, 2015	Willmar, Minn.	15	0
Feb. 26, 2015	Rochester, Minn.	7	0

PASSENGER RAIL FORUM MEETINGS

Following the adoption of the 2010 State Rail Plan, Minnesota rail stakeholders remained engaged in rail planning issues through the formation of an Intercity Passenger Rail Transportation Forum. The Passenger Rail Forum meets on the first Monday of every month. For this update to the Minnesota State Rail Plan, the PRF was engaged at two

points in plan development at standing meetings. The purpose of these workshops was to inform stakeholders of plan progress, gain stakeholder input on the draft plan, and gain input on rail system needs to be considered.

Workshops occurred at the Nov. 3, 2014, and Feb. 2, 2015, PRF meetings.

MINNESOTA STATEWIDE FREIGHT SUMMIT

MnDOT and the Center for Transportation Studies at the University of Minnesota held a Statewide Freight Summit on Dec. 5, 2014. Speakers included:

- Commissioner Charles Zelle, MnDOT
- Caitlin Rayman, Federal Highway Administration
- Bill Goins, FedEx
- Jeffrey Rainey, Greater MSP
- Erika Witzke, Cambridge Systematics

Members of the project team for the 2015 Minnesota State Rail Plan were present to listen to participant feedback as it pertained to rail. Notes were compiled from the breakout conversations and used to guide this update to the 2010 State Rail Plan.

TARGETED MEETINGS

Within the first 3 months of plan development, targeted meetings were held with high-level industry leaders throughout the state to discuss general industry needs and issues important to plan development. The purpose of these meetings was to engage industry experts on the technical content development for the 2015 plan. A full list of stakeholder engagement is provided later in this chapter.

METROQUEST ONLINE SURVEY

The State Rail Plan was updated at the same time Minnesota was writing a Statewide Freight Plan, which allowed for public and stakeholder outreach efforts for each plan to work together. An interactive, online survey called MetroQuest was developed to gain input on the Statewide Freight Plan. The survey included an exercise that allowed participants to identify issues on Minnesota's multimodal freight system. Feedback pertaining to rail was captured for use in this plan update.

WEBSITE AND ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

For the course of this update, MnDOT hosted a website for the State Rail Plan. Members of the public could access information on public outreach, online resources and contact information for the plan on the website. This included a place to submit comments online. The website was available at www.dot.state.mn.us/planning/railplan.

Coordination with Neighboring States and Canada

Minnesota is at the center of the continent, bordered by North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Canada. Rail connections are made to all of these neighboring states and Canada. Throughout plan development, the point

was emphasized that private railroads do not look at the system from a lens of state boundaries. The State Rail Plan should not limit regional connections. Coordination efforts with neighboring states and Canada were made to ensure the 2015 Minnesota State Rail Plan represents Minnesota's regional position.

Several of Minnesota's proposed passenger rail corridors terminate in or move through areas outside of Minnesota. Coordination with these states' respective Departments of Transportation will be critical to developing passenger service. This coordination began on projects such as the Northern Lights Express and the study of a second daily Empire Builder train between Minnesota and Chicago. The Tier I Draft Environmental Impact Study between the Twin Cities and Milwaukee, Wisc., moves forward in a coordinated effort between MnDOT and the Federal Railroad Administration. These coordination efforts are captured in the passenger rail planning components of the 2015 Minnesota State Rail Plan.

Coordination with other states occurred through open house outreach. In the first round of open houses, MnDOT facilitated a meeting in Eau Claire, Wisc. There were 98 people in attendance. Most were there to express strong interest in a passenger rail connection between Eau Claire and the Twin Cities. At the Moorhead open house, representatives from the North Dakota Department of Transportation were in attendance to learn about the 2015 Minnesota State Rail Plan. North Dakota will be writing its State Rail Plan in 2015. Officials discussed items of coordination moving into the future.

Minnesota is concurrently completing a statewide freight plan update, which involves interviews with agency freight experts at each of the neighboring states and provinces including Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Manitoba, and Ontario. This exercise focuses on learning key trends and issues, current/near-term needs, infrastructure bottlenecks, operational bottlenecks, performance measures, and freight planning efforts as they pertain to Minnesota.

Stakeholder Engagement

The consultant team and MnDOT worked closely with rail carriers, local governments and various other agencies in the composition of the 2015 Minnesota State Rail Plan. State Rail Plan team members attended the Minnesota Rail Summit and the Minnesota Freight Advisory Committee in 2014 to listen to rail stakeholders and receive comments on what the Minnesota rail infrastructure system needs in the future. Various city and metropolitan planning organization officials attended the open house meetings around the state, and their suggestions were expressed through the public process. Stakeholder comments were taken into consideration while making short- and long-term recommendations for the 2015 Minnesota State Rail Plan.

A list of public and private stakeholders engaged throughout the 2015 Minnesota State Rail Plan development is listed in [Table 6.2](#).

Table 6.2: Stakeholder Group Engagement

STAKEHOLDER GROUP	DATE	ATTENDEES
Twin Cities & Western	12/3/2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mark Wegner • Dave Long
Midwest Shippers Association	12/3/2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bruce Abbey
Minnesota Grain & Feed Association	12/3/2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bob Zelenka
Minnesota Regional Railroad Association	12/4/2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Apitz
Minnesota Commercial Railroad	12/4/2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wayne Hall • Joe Kellner
Canadian Pacific Railway	12/12/2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Herb Jones • Judy Mitchell
Union Pacific Railroad	12/16/2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wes Lujan • David Rector • Jeff Chapman • Mark Bristol
BNSF Railway	2/27/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brian Sweeney • Colleen Weatherford
Progressive Rail	*not complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Layne Leitner

Public and Stakeholder Feedback

This section documents public and stakeholder feedback collected through the methods discussed at the beginning of this section. Issues raised and recommendations made throughout plan development were taken into consideration by the project team. The trends discussed in [Chapter 1](#) and [Chapter 2](#) of this plan were developed from public comments. Specific comments were addressed, where appropriate, throughout the plan.

PUBLIC FEEDBACK

Open House Round 1

Public open houses for the 2015 Minnesota State Rail Plan were held throughout the state in October, November and December 2014. The open houses aimed to educate attendees on the 2015 Minnesota State Rail Plan, receive public feedback on rail topics for both freight and passenger service, and provide opportunities for participants to influence plan development. Materials at the open houses included display boards, presentations specific to the location, Statewide Freight Plan stations, comment forms, and various project handouts. Meetings generally ran from 5 to 7 p.m. A complete summary of each open house by location is provided as [Appendix D](#) and an inventory of written comments is provided as [Appendix E](#).

- **Rail Improvements:** A recurring theme at most open houses was the desire to increase safety standards both for rail siding infrastructure and freight rail cars themselves. Many respondents at various open houses were concerned with rail safety and congestion related to the recent Bakken oil boom. Attendees expressed desires to make freight companies disclose commodity information in rail cars to the communities they pass through, to construct double track segments in congested rail corridors, and to update safety standards for oil tankers. Several respondents also frequently identified passenger rail as a need throughout the state, but the open houses in towns with Empire Builder service expressed frustration with recent Amtrak delays. Other recommended improvements included expanding system capacity and upgrading rail for increased speed.
- **Passenger Rail:** Many respondents at each open house expressed support for passenger rail development in Minnesota and the Upper Midwest. Although questions and comments about passenger rail were usually specific to the city in which the open house was hosted, many citizens were also interested in statewide passenger rail development. Most project-specific comments were about the proposed Zip Rail and Northern Lights Express lines. Large, widespread support was expressed for studying passenger rail to Eau Claire, Wis., while generally good support was expressed for studying passenger rail to Northfield and expanding Northstar Commuter Rail to St. Cloud. Some respondents were opposed to any passenger rail development, citing capital cost and land impacts as major deterrents. Respondents almost unanimously expressed frustration regarding Amtrak delays and expressed a desire to add a second daily Empire Builder train for both eastbound and westbound movements.
- **General:** Several respondents gave detailed suggestions to the 2015 Minnesota State Rail Plan specifically. Other comments received included requests to develop a rail system that supports renewable energy sources, mitigate noise and heavier train weight impacts, ship more diverse commodities, and pair passenger rail with economic, and land development opportunities.

Open House Round 2

A second round of public open houses for the 2015 Minnesota State Rail Plan were held throughout the state in January and February 2015. The open houses were intended to educate attendees on the 2015 Minnesota State Rail Plan and receive public feedback on rail topics for freight and passenger service. The second round also allowed respondents to comment on the draft plan. Materials at the open houses included display boards, a presentation, a Freight Plan station, and comment forms. Most meetings ran in the evening from 5 to 7 p.m., with some running in the afternoon and during the lunchtime hours. A complete summary of each open house by location is provided as [Appendix D](#). An inventory of written comments is provided as [Appendix E](#).

- **Rail Improvements:** Similar to the open houses held in fall 2014, rail safety was a primary concern from respondents. Safety concerns related to the recent Bakken oil boom and subsequent freight rail shipment was still noted by attendees; however, concerns dealing with stopped freight trains blocking roads near at-grade crossings was a larger topic in this round. Several respondents cited instances where stopped trains near at-grade crossings placed safety hazards on their communities, and asked to prioritize the implementation of highway-rail grade separations at key bottlenecks throughout the state.
- **Passenger Rail:** Continuing from the original round of open houses, many respondents expressed support for passenger rail development in Minnesota. A large grassroots contingency from Northfield and southern

Minnesota demonstrated major support for a Twin Cities to Northfield passenger rail line. Large support for passenger rail development continued to be expressed in Eau Claire, and a large majority continued to support Northstar Commuter Rail expansion to St. Cloud. Several respondents were opposed to overall passenger rail development around the state, citing high implementation costs.

- **General:** Respondents continued to express widespread support for freight rail safety improvements, specifically along lines carrying silica sand and Bakken oil shipments. While many were concerned about rail safety and congestion, several respondents noted that they were pleased to see the rail industry growing, and recognized the positive economic impact that railroads have on the state of Minnesota.

Public Hearing

A public hearing for the Minnesota State Rail Plan was held on Feb. 10, 2015 from 3 to 4:30 p.m. in the MnDOT Conference Room G13-14 in St. Paul, Minnesota. The hearing was advertised through MnDOT communications, including a press release, on the project website and at project open houses. Attendees were invited to provide testimony on the draft State Rail Plan. Two individuals provided comment. Testimony included general concern regarding the planned Zip Rail project and requests for specific changes and additions to the plan. A full transcript of the public hearing is provided in [Appendix D](#).

Online Comments

Online comments were received throughout plan development. Respondents submitted comments on the State Rail Plan website and submitted feedback via email directly to the project manager. Key themes included freight rail congestion, rail impacts, Amtrak delays, and passenger rail. Other comments received were about Northstar commuter rail expansion, open house suggestions, and the update of 2015 data. A full inventory of comments received online throughout plan development is provided in [Appendix E](#). Key themes are summarized here.

- **Rail Congestion:** Many respondents expressed economic and safety concerns regarding recent freight rail traffic increases. Feedback was provided on how to expand system capacity.
- **Rail Impacts:** Multiple comments were received about traffic impacts associated with blocked crossings by freight cars in greater Minnesota. Other comments were received on vibration impacts experienced by property owners along existing freight rail corridors. Some respondents indicated concerns with noise impacts along routes.
- **Amtrak Delays:** Several online commenters identified recent Amtrak schedule delays as preventing them from taking the service even though they used and enjoyed the service before.
- **Passenger Rail:** The majority of comments regarding passenger rail were in favor of developing the system. Some respondents were opposed to passenger rail development. Many online submissions were received in favor of connections from the Twin Cities to Eau Claire and Northfield.

LETTERS AND RESOLUTIONS

Throughout plan development, MnDOT received letters and resolutions from various stakeholder groups regarding plan development. Various cities, authorities and groups within the Twin Cities/South Central Minnesota passenger rail corridor expressed support for elevating this route to Phase I development status. These letters and resolutions are provided in [Appendix F](#) and summarized in [Table 6.3](#).

Table 6.3: Letters and Resolutions

LETTER/RESOLUTION	MAIN POINTS
Albert Lea Economic Development Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
Albert Lea-Freeborn County Chamber of Commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
All Aboard Minnesota	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broaden focus to five-state region approach for passenger rail corridors Focus on passenger rail corridors that are greater than 100 miles Refine ridership modeling Invest in public-private partnerships with railroads on capital projects Secure a double track mainline between Minneapolis and St. Paul for passenger rail use Consider long distance through trains
Bike Northfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – Northfield corridor to Phase I development status
Carleton College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
City of Albert Lea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
City of Dundas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – Northfield corridor to Phase I development status
City of Faribault	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
City of Farmington	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota (through Northfield) corridor to Phase I development status
City of Lonsdale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – Northfield corridor to Phase I development status
City of Mankato	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain Tier I status of Mankato – Metro Twin Cities line
City of Northfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – Northfield corridor to Phase I development status
City of Northfield Economic Development Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – Northfield corridor to Phase I development status
City of Owatonna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – Northfield corridor to Phase I development status
City of Rosemount	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
City of Saint Paul	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status Support connection at Union Depot in downtown Saint Paul

LETTER/RESOLUTION	MAIN POINTS
City of Savage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota (through Northfield) corridor to Phase I development status
City of Savage Mayor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Elevate Twin Cities – Northfield corridor to Phase I development status
City of Shakopee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
Dakota County Regional Railroad Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consider comments on safety, capacity, passenger service, and other
Faribault Area Chamber of Commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
Farmers Union Industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encourage the state to continue funding and finish the work of the publicly owned railroad in Redwood County
Freeborn County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota (through Northfield and Albert Lea) corridor to Phase I development status
Friends of the Mill Towns State Trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
Minnesota Farm Bureau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make system improvements to accommodate existing and future demand ● Resolve bottlenecks ● Improve safety ● Prioritize freight movements on rail ● Discontinue high speed rail in the plan
Minnesota State Legislators David Bly, Frank Hornstein, Alice Hausman, Rick Hanson, Rina Liebling, Dan Sparks, Clark Johnson, and John Considine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
Northfield Convention and Visitors Bureau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
Northfield Hospital and Clinics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
Northfield Public Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Supports additional analysis of intercity passenger rail between Twin Cities (Union Depot) and South Central Minnesota ● Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
Ramsey County Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Supports additional analysis of intercity passenger rail between Twin Cities

LETTER/RESOLUTION	MAIN POINTS
Railroad Authority, Chair	(Union Depot) and South Central Minnesota <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
Renville County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider including the Minnesota Valley Regional Rail Authority to complete the rail and bridge rehabilitation remaining on 60 miles of track that stretches from Winthrop to Hanley Falls
Rice County Board of Commissioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – Northfield corridor to Phase I development status
Saint Cloud Area Planning Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize passenger rail investments based on project demand and cost-benefit analysis Show St. Cloud – Twin Cities as highest priority corridor for Greater Minnesota investment
Scott County Association for Leadership and Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community and Tribal Chairman Charlie Vig	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
St. Croix Valley Rail Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Call the Eau Claire passenger line stop “Hudson-River Falls” Modify the passenger rail map Consider the Fox River Valley in future planning Conduct Hudson and River Falls public meetings
St. Olaf College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
Steele County Board of Commissioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevate Twin Cities – South Central Minnesota corridor to Phase I development status
U.S. Highway 169 Corridor Coalition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain Tier I status of Mankato – Metro Twin Cities line

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

As a component of the outreach plan, a number of individual stakeholders were interviewed to provide input on key trends that have arisen since the last rail plan and to highlight concerns moving forward. This process revealed a number of common themes. In the last five years, the industry experienced substantial change, along with unforeseen growth and their associated challenges. In Minnesota, recent trends principally revolve around increased traffic, economic growth and safety. Rail volumes expanded across most of Minnesota’s traditional commodity groups, while energy sector volume, particularly crude-by-rail shipments, saw massive increases. In addition to a growth in volume, rail traffic mix adapted to meet industry demands. This is particularly true in agriculture, where the types of crops produced and methods of shipping used have shifted since 2010.

To accompany growth and expansion trends, industries associated with energy and freight transportation sector increased substantially in the state, with most Class I railroads continuing to hire at unprecedented levels. Increased traffic and demand also have pushed safety to the forefront of public discussion. Higher volumes of rail traffic led to increased exposure at highway-rail crossings in many Minnesota communities, while emergency response capabilities became more of a concern due to increased shipments of hazardous materials on railways. Response to safety concerns engaged public stakeholders, as many states, including Minnesota, are actively evaluating crossing safety, training hazmat response teams and exploring new means of promoting safety within their communities. From a private perspective, Class I operators in Minnesota are investing at historic levels, and while most investment is aimed at capacity expansion, safer operations are a key focus. Within the next several years, positive train control will be deployed across major portions of the state, which will increase safety for railroad employees and citizens alike. Additional trends expected over the next several years include:

- **Positive Train Control:** Essentially, the Class I Railroads are well on the way to implementing PTC; however, implementation remains an issue for short lines. Affected carriers may include Twin Cities and Western Railroad, Minnesota Commercial, Red River Valley, and Progressive Rail. Installation of PTC on a pre-third generation locomotive is expected to cost more than \$100,000, which is beyond the financial ability of many short lines.
- **Impacts of the Minnesota Rail Safety Bill:** The bill includes elements for safety training, rail yard lighting and expanded inspections, was passed by the legislature in 2014 and imposes significant burdens on industry. The rules, which were supposed to be released in October, have yet to be seen, even though compliance must be achieved by March 2015.
- **Railroad police authority in Minnesota:** Railroad police authority is problematic for Class I operators, who employ independent law enforcement staff charged with protecting railroad assets and promoting safety for employees as well as the general public in and around railroad property. Minnesota is one of two states in the U.S. where railroad police don't have full police authority. Furthermore, trespassing along a rail right of way is only a misdemeanor offense, which does not properly reflect the risks association with this infraction.
- **Rail and rail-related funding from the public sector:** The Minnesota Rail Service Improvement Program needs expansion. MRSI was founded in 1976, and has seen little modification since then, particularly in terms of the overall funding amounts. Their members use it regularly and current restrictions and funding levels impede its use. Compared to other states in the Midwest and other parts of the United States, MnDOT's rail funding mechanism tends to present limitations for railroads looking for grant and loan funding sources. In addition, many rail projects also qualify for Minnesota Port Development Assistance Program, which could also benefit from expansion in funding.
- **Capacity constraints:** There is interest among all parties for finding consensus and funding for Hoffman Junction improvements, of which the Westminster trench is of primary interest to UP, as it would separate their traffic from BNSF, and improve CP's access to its St. Paul Yard. There are physical and political constraints to developing rail-served industrial space in the metro area. General pressure to increase capacity by expanding yards, sidings/double tracks, and increasing centralized traffic control signal coverage among the Class I railroads in and around Minnesota.
- **Access to major freight centers and consumer markets:** For Minnesota agricultural producers, efficient access to the West Coast efficiently is paramount. The river is only a relief valve, and producers need good

transportation to the west. There is a growing feed market in California, western Canada and Texas, while the traditional southeastern feed market is shrinking. For Minnesota intermodal traffic, efficient access to Chicago and other Midwest intermodal facilities, such as Kansas City, is paramount.

- **Using rail to promote economic development in the state:** With recent and rapid increases in rail demand, there is a lot of opportunity for Minnesota to capitalize on rail services. One reference for MnDOT and other Minnesota public agencies, which was recently completed, is the Freight Rail and Economic Development Study. Collaborating with MnDOT and other agencies through PPPs to promote mutually beneficial capacity improvements.
- **Volatility in agricultural markets:** Multiple variables in agricultural markets can cause huge disparities in how and when products get shipped. Record harvests combined with ag market prices led to producers holding back much of their production from distribution channels. Minnesota will continue to be a major player in agricultural markets, but may not be prepared for peak demand/shipping of certain commodities.

METROQUEST REPOSESES

As a part of a concurrent planning effort for the Minnesota Statewide Freight Plan, MnDOT created an online, interactive survey called MetroQuest for stakeholders and members of the public to provide input on the existing freight system. The survey was available from Sept. 23, 2014, to Dec. 23, 2014. It was developed as a supplemental method for gaining information in conjunction with open houses and targeted meetings.

The survey included project information and opportunities to provide feedback on the various freight modes, current freight priorities and identify where freight needs are located throughout the state. A total of 600 people took the survey, of which 414 provided additional information about themselves. Approximately half of those responding to the survey are involved in freight movement, and approximately 60 percent of respondents work in the private sector.

Feedback received regarding Minnesota’s rail network is summarized here. The following questions pertaining to the 2015 Minnesota State Rail Plan were asked:

- How important is rail to you or your organization?
- What needs are there for Minnesota’s rail system?

Rail Importance

Survey respondents were given an overview of Minnesota’s freight system and each of the modes used for freight shipment. They were then able to rank the importance of each mode to them or their organization on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being not important/don’t use, 3 being average importance/use with other modes, and 5 being very important/use exclusively) and provide any comments they had on each specific mode. Rail was ranked as the second-most important mode, after the highway system. The average ranking for each system is listed in [Table 6.4](#).

Table 6.4: Freight Survey Mode Importance Results

SYSTEM	AVERAGE RANKING	TIMES RANKED
Highway	3.91	544

SYSTEM	AVERAGE RANKING	TIMES RANKED
Railroad	2.94	517
Waterway	2.38	508
Aviation	2.80	501
Pipeline	2.70	203

In addition to providing a simple ranking, respondents could choose to provide comments for each mode. Comments received pertaining to rail are below:

- Not a shipper - but an engineering design firm. Important for clients and communities.
- As a retired private citizen I do not think that this survey is intended for me.
- How current is this data—have oil and sand trains in past 1-2 years gotten into top 3?
- No student transportation
- Rail is a growing piece of transportation for people to jobs, events, etc. However, as we have seen growth in 2014 for freight shipment of goods, how can we balance the impacts on both freight and people movement?
- I am not an "organization." So I am not answering some of the questions. How to answer (for a person) is ambiguous, e.g., the importance of trains. Important to me for freight? Or for travel? You can't tell from the 1-5 system. The trains are important to me, but they should NEVER carry products like fossil fuels or chlorine, etc., that can harm citizens. Preemption, you say? That should END.

Investment Needs

Respondents highlighted investment needs for Minnesota’s freight network by placing pins on an interactive map. There were a combined 813 needs identified for all freight modes—208 of these were identified for rail. Results are shown in [Figure 6.1](#) and [Figure 6.2](#), with an inventory of needs provided in [Table 6.5](#).

Figure 6.1: MetroQuest Rail Investment Needs Map

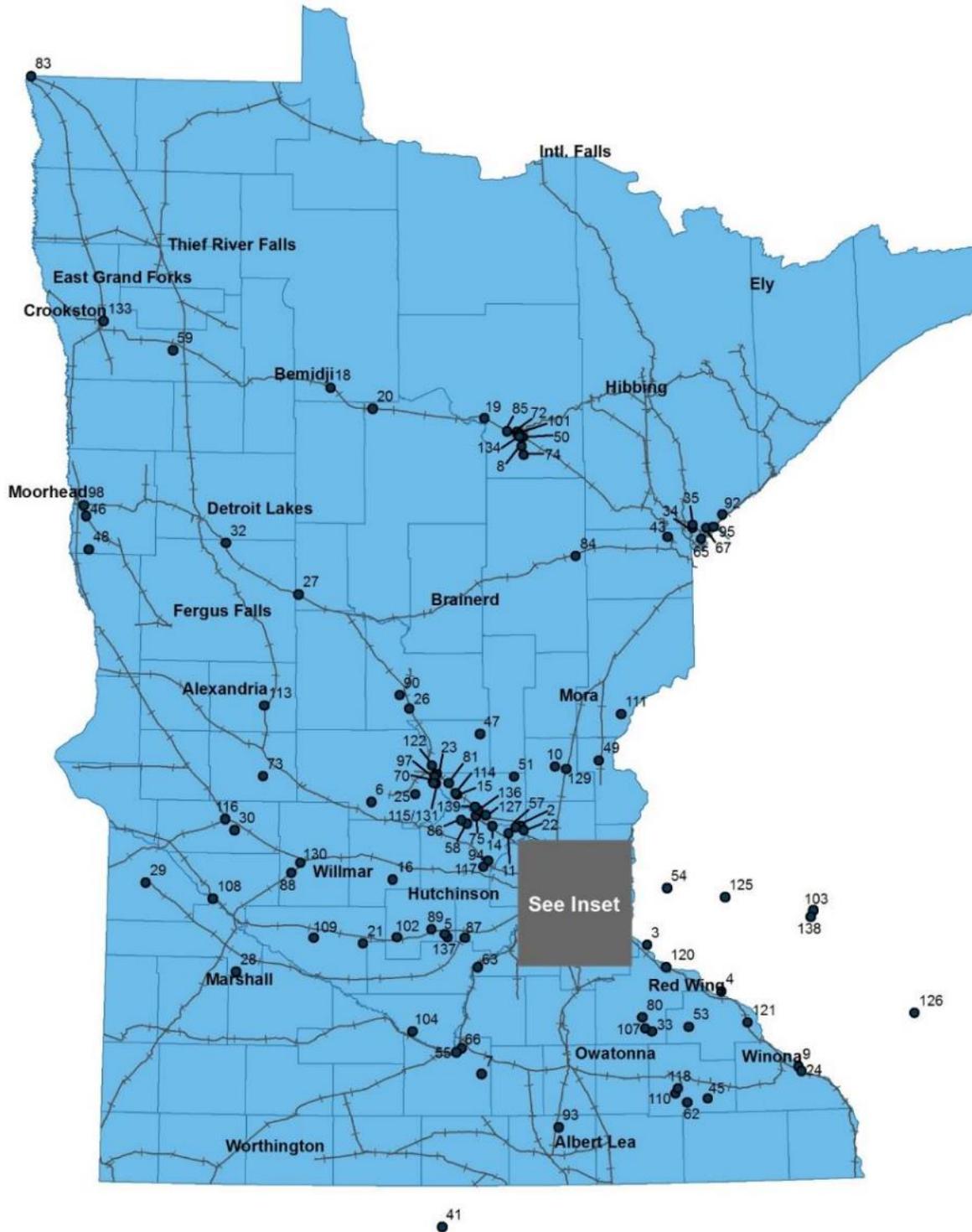


Figure 6.2: MetroQuest Rail Investment Needs Twin Cities Region Inset Map

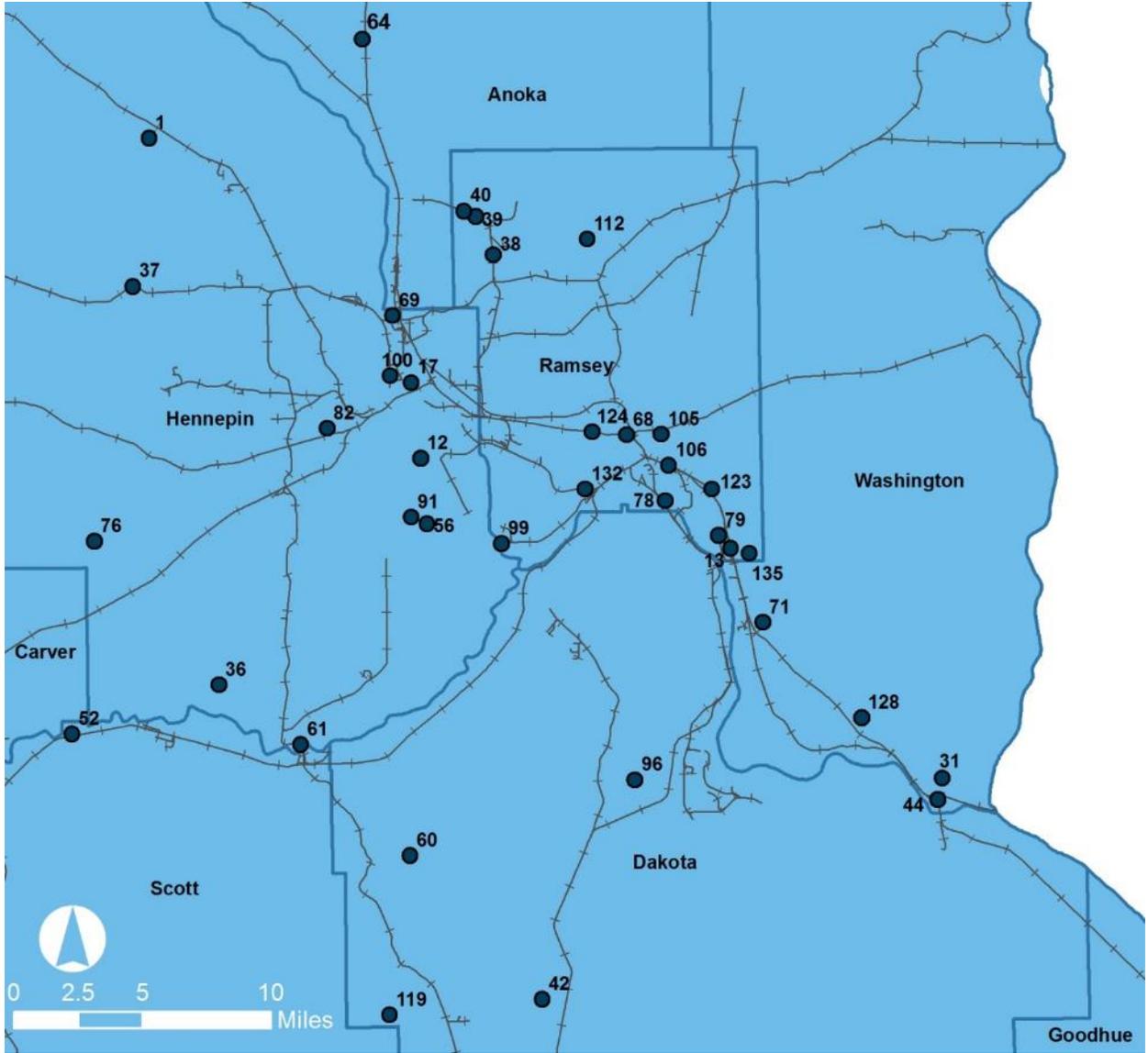


Table 6.5: MetroQuest Rail Investment Needs

NO.	COMMENT
1	Would like commuter option from downtown to Maple Grove area
2	With passenger and freight trains using the same tracks, the congestion is growing. We need to look at a better way for both to be on same tracks.
3	Wisconsin too: Degasify, safety training and equipment, and second rail line in addition to pull offs
4	Wisconsin too: Degasify, safety training and equipment, and second rail line in addition to pull offs
5	Will help economy we have tracks use them more wisely
6	We..essentially...need the BNSF served 'High Line' northern corridor to be double tracked (or as near to double-tracked as possible) from Chicago to the PWN ports. But short of that, we need it to be as fast moving as possible through our state.
7	We need light rail to the south metro, or we need to get out of the Met Council.
8	We need a reliable and competitive rail system. If we can't get our raw materials in a timely and cost effective manner. We go out of business.
9	We need a reliable Amtrak schedule with 2 trains a day each way between the Twin Cities and Chicago.
10	We have a spur but the train blocking traffic on Hwy 95 when it stops is unsafe and causes congestion
11	We have 2 tracks running through Elk River and with the amount of trains that are currently being used there can be back ups of traffic at rush hours
12	We depend on timely delivery
13	Unreliable service
14	Train delays impact coal delivery to Sherco power plant!
15	Too many trains travel through day and night sometime holding up traffic for 20 minutes or longer causing consumers to sit in long lines of traffic wasting fuel while their cars idol.
16	Too many oil trains coming from North Dakota into MN...causing safety issues,.
17	To encourage public to use this efficient transportation; hence reduce workload to other transportation means especially highway
18	Three Rails all the way to Duluth Ports for grains and farm products
19	Three rails all the way to Duluth port
20	Three rails all the way to Duluth for goods movement
21	This rail line needs to have a program to replace its jointed rails with continuously welded rails, and also needs to construct rail passing sidings
22	The Staples subdivision is very congested.
23	The second rail line between St. Cloud and the twin cities should be reconnected to allow for more rail transportation and less rail delay.
24	The railways through town need to be redirected around the city or over passes need to be built. In addition carrying fuel and gases through the town on rail is dangerous. Crossing need to be upgraded as well.
25	The railroad system through St Cloud and across the rickety old bridge in downtown St Cloud don't always feel safe to me and my family!!! They need replacing or improvements!!
26	The railroad congestion in this area is horrible. They back up and end up blocking crossings for over an hour. The noise in Rice from the blaring horns is unbearable, especially during the summer. The crossing in Rice is too narrow for pedestrians to safely cross. I will not let my kids ride bike to school because of it.

NO.	COMMENT
27	The railroad bisects our town; frequent congestion backs up traffic and cuts the southern half of the town from access to the hospital in the northern half of town during emergencies. Create an overpass so that the increasing train traffic does not increase road congestion or safety of residents.
28	The Rail Line from Hanley Falls to Winthrop needs to have its 100 year old rails replaced and bridges upgraded so that the pent up demand for economic development in this area can be achieved
29	The existing Rail is only LQP Regional Rail. Pavement upkeep and replacement is not feasible. More rail is needed to move the existing farm commodities and the soon to be increased production yields of corn and soybeans.
30	Stopped trains routinely block access in and out of Benson.
31	St. Croix Jct. Grade Separation
32	Speed, major curve in the rail, safety is the concern
33	Somewhere along HWY 52 there is an at grade crossing that should be eliminated if possible
34	Should be a bridge at this railroad crossing
35	Should be a bridge at this railroad crossing
36	See nearby Highway recommendation -- re improved road access for trucks entering and leaving the two Twin Cities intermodal rail yards.
37	Safety - for motorists as the crossing has a terrible dip in elevation, which also creates a water/icy crossing condition. Also, the train stops and creates major delays for motorists
38	Safety
39	Safety
40	Safety
41	Safe crossings, switch yard capacity, passenger rail to mpl with freight
42	Reliable rail service can bring in goods otherwise trucked from Chicago and can then backload with agricultural produce for export.
43	Raw materials delivery
44	Raise BNSF and CP Rail Lines along River
45	Railroads are a necessity and if used appropriately they should be able to make money.
46	Rail/road congestion and delays in Moorhead
47	Rail traffic along the US 10 corridor from Detroit Lakes to the Twin Cities is often backed up impacting freight and passenger rail alike. This should almost be a four track corridor.
48	Rail service has been delayed in this area, costing farmers and ag businesses money and marketing opportunities, specifically grain for exports. The Northwest area has been hit hard.
49	Rail service between the twin cities and duluth. would reduce congestion and improve safety. primarily movement of people rather than goods.
50	Rail runs through the heart of Grand Rapids which causes traffic congestion and emergency response delays while trains are moving through town. Also, we have issues getting reliable rail service due to rail congestion.
51	Rail or light rail to St. Cloud.
52	Rail needs to be rerouted out of cental shakoppe downtown. Not only does it significantly slow down the train. I have seen pedestrians cross even if signals are on.
53	Rail needs to be made more reliable. I attempted to take Amtrak to Chicago, but the train had been delayed in states to the west, due to freight traffic. Amtrak hired two busses from Minneapolis to Chicago. This was in the last 6

NO.	COMMENT
	months. Upgrade the tracks. Add another line beside the freight, so the passenger trains can run on schedule. It works in Europe; why can't it work here?
54	Rail line between Eau Claire and Minneapolis would be a tremendous asset to our business, JAMF Software, and in my opinion, it would have a great economic impact on both cities in general. There are many individuals in the Eau Claire area that would utilize the rail system for shopping and entertainment in addition to the rail being used for commuters during the week.
55	Rail is one of the most efficient ways to move goods, I think we should keep developing this from a central major hub sent out to all major and minor cities.
56	Rail freight and passenger/transit traffic on the same tracks hinder both applications. Freight development and trackside TOD are both hindered.
57	Rail expansion is necessary to move goods and people on mainline routes.
58	Rail congestion has created problems for Northstar, as well as delays at crossings.
59	Rail car shortage, congestion
60	Rail car shortage
61	Rail bridge should be upgraded and capacity increased
62	Rail access that avoids Chicago can get goods to LA faster for export.
63	Preserve capacity on UP for future intercity passenger rail. Without increase in capacity, additional frac sand traffic will preclude passenger rail option. Make improvements in Shakopee and St. Paul to support interchange efforts and preserve potential passenger routes to downtown stations.
64	Passenger service needed all the way to St Cloud
65	Passenger rail would be REALLY helpful from Twin Ports to MSP
66	Passenger connection to twin cities.
67	Passenger connection to Duluth
68	Passenger connection to Chicago
69	Northtown rail yard too congested last 12+ months
70	Northstar station in Saint Cloud
71	Newport BNSF/CP crossover Improvements
72	Need to speed up trains going through grand rapids. Major gridlock for cars whenever trains go through
73	Need to get the products to market
74	Need second railroad line and carrier
75	NEED SECOND RAIL LINE BETWEEN BIG LAKE and CLEAR LAKE (COULD BE ST. CLOUD)
76	Need safe rail line for TCW Railroad to continue to transport goods through the twin cities
77	Need more direct line to get oil out without increasing rail congestion
78	Need increased rail access to Southport River Terminal
79	Need additional rail access from Red Rock River Terminal
80	Need additional freight capacity and passenger rail (commuter, not zip rail) between Rochester and Twin Cities
81	Need additional capacity in this area
82	Need "drop arms" at intersections

NO.	COMMENT
83	More Rail lines to increase capacity
84	More rail lines
85	More rail capacity for delivery of coal
86	More light rail in this area to mpls may loosen up congested roadway systems
87	Minnesota Valley Regional Rail Authority owns 94.7 miles of track from Norwood Young America west to Hanley Falls, MN. This infrastructure impacts 16 communities and the businesses including all the ag businesses and ag producers who feed the world and provide commodities for ethanol, biofuels, salt, tallow and other products used all over the country. We contract with Minnesota Prairie Line who is our contract operator. MVRRA is a publicly owned railroad statutorily authorized by the State of Minnesota. We have complete approximately 34 miles of rehab from Norwood Young America to just west of Winthrop with 115 lb continuous welded rail, and these improvements are benefiting the communities with new business development occurring along those 34 miles of track. We have 60 miles yet to go and some major developments that can happen when the rest of the track is rehabbed along with the bridges that cross the Minnesota River. Every carload we ship replace 3 semis not tearing of our MN Highways!
88	Make the Wye connection west of Willmar to direct rail traffic out of the main rail yard in willmar.
89	Make sure rail delivery/transport remains viable
90	Lots of trains daily. I have seen some sit waiting to go thru Little Falls. Crossing is just west of the Mississippi River bridge. Backs up traffic many times thruout the day.
91	Light rail in North South corridor from Minneapolis to Southern suburbs.
92	Less Congestion
93	Intermodal rail service needed to give MN & Twin Cities access to LA/Long Beach container shipping ports. UP container rail service on the Spine Line through K.C. to southern California. A much needed development that would strengthen Minnesota's global trade capability and our international trade economy.
94	Intermodal is backed up and very time consuming for drivers to retrieve containers - need infrastructure improvements to ramps
95	Intermodal access
96	Intermodal access
97	Intermodal Access
98	Intermodal access
99	Integrate transit options, such as commuter rail, within freight corridors.
100	Install 5 additional Main Tracks with CTC Signals
101	Improve rail service especially in winter. Need to receive rail cars on time and get switched when needed. Most rail cars are obsolete designs with difficult to operate doors and valves. Need improved ergonomics for loading and unloading of cars. Need new designs for cars which require less manual labor to operate. Need general improvements to railroad operation. It's 2014, GPS can tell exactly where we are while driving or walking, but rail cars are spotted by hand, identified by reading numbers instead of scanning tags, switches are operated manually. It's time to embrace new technology the 1800's are over. Please improve safety, ergonomics, reliability and provide service options for cost control. The railroad is a monopoly with truck as the only alternative they strangle manufacturing.
102	I wish we could have a passengers train to go to the cities to work and get better jobs instead of commuting. Not possible in winter to commute because of weather
103	I need to go to the Cities (and Chicago) to consume their products!
104	I have a rail spur on my property for unloading rail cars of lumber. When MNDOT made an upgrade on the right of

NO.	COMMENT
	way next to my building, they tore out the tracks servicing my building. Now that I want to bring in rail cars I cannot because of the break in the rail line.
105	Hoffman junction is incredibly congested
106	Hoffman Interlocking capacity/fluidity improvements
107	Hi-speed rail between Rochester and Twin Cities
108	Grain Shipments in this area have been hampered by access to grain cars for transportation. It appears that priority for shipping has gone to tanker cars for crude oil instead
109	Grain shipment to harbor and terminals
110	Grain and coal
111	Good rail is essential.
112	Freight Capacity and Safety Issues at Hoffman Yard and Others identified in the East Metro Freight Railroad Capacity Study
113	Faster rail speeds
114	Expansion of NorthStar Commuter Rail to St. Cloud.
115	Eliminate congestion of line from Saint Cloud to Minneapolis.
116	Due to the increased shipments by rail we continue to have increased stoppage of trains on all of the rail crossings in our town, affecting schools, economics, emergency vehicles, etc.
117	Double main railroad to ease up freight and passenger traffic
118	Develop intercity passenger rail service between Rochester and Twin Cities
119	Develop intercity passenger rail service
120	Degasify, safety training and equipment, and second rail line in addition to pull offs
121	Degasify, safety training and equipment, and second rail line in addition to pull offs
122	Create multiple rail lines to increase the volume capability for freight rail lines and mass transit rail opportunities.
123	CP/BNSF/UP Yard Improvements
124	Connections for Pass!
125	Connect Minneapolis (through Eau Claire) to Madison!
126	Connect Minneapolis (through Eau Claire) to Madison!
127	Concerned about rail safety at or near critical junction of highway and power infrastructure.
128	Collocation of BNSF and CP mainlines
129	Bridge or underpass required for traffic flow.
130	BNSF currently has to go into Willmar and turn their train around to go southerly toward Marshall. BNSF/MnDOT/City/County are proposing a RR bypass to reduce this congestion, improve safety, improve access to the industrial park for economic expansion.
131	Better passenger & commuting trains
132	Assure good condition of tracks, freight and passenger needs are met.
133	Another rail line and Consistant RR times especiaslly for passenger trains
134	ADDITIONAL RAIL LINES TO MOVE ITEMS OTHER THAN OIL
135	Additional Mainline Capacity, Union Depot to Hastings

NO.	COMMENT
136	Add track to BNSF rail line or add pipeline. Rail congestion blocks roadways, safety hazard.
137	A rail yard needs to be built near Glencoe so that switching performed in the sw suburbs can be relocated to a rural area
138	A passenger rail line from Altoona to the Twin Cities would help relief I-94 of traffic.
139	2 rail road tracks instead of one

Planning Coordination and Integration

Minnesota coordinates state rail planning with other transportation planning activities at the statewide and local levels. This plan is a part of MnDOT's "Family of Plans"—beginning with a statewide transportation visioning process in 2012 and followed by the Statewide Multimodal Plan. Minnesota's Family of Plans includes plans for each mode of transportation. They are coordinated to follow the same direction and vision called Minnesota GO. The 2015 Minnesota State Rail Plan was updated to follow Minnesota GO standards. It takes into consideration policies and priorities outlined in the Statewide Multimodal Plan.

Prior to Minnesota GO, planning efforts that incorporate rail as a mode traditionally occurred outside of the standard MnDOT planning processes. This placed rail at a distinct disadvantage, particularly for project funding, long-term transportation investment strategies and needs assessments. Under Minnesota GO, however, MnDOT made a concerted effort to include multimodal freight in its Minnesota Statewide Transportation Plan. There is a freight dimension to the Infrastructure Preservation Policy, which includes freight objectives and performance measures. These new initiatives were started in mid-2009 to enhance multimodal planning and the centralized coordination of investments and performance evaluation of all modes in a consistent, agency-wide process.

MnDOT can improve recognition of rail-related needs as well in day-to-day highway engineering activities. The agency has been slow to adopt current standards, such as overpass clearances (the federal standard is 23 feet, 3.75 inches), and taking into consideration future needs during the design of highways. For example, when projects are proposed that entail constructing highway structures over rail lines, future capacity needs should be taken into consideration. In instances where a line currently is single track, if traffic projections indicate potential need for a second track, sufficient clearance should be provided to do so.